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Omaha District

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Corps hosts first Cultural Resources Task Force meeting in Bismarck

Bismarck, N.D.—The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Omaha District, hosted an historic event in Bismarck last week—its first Cultural Resources Task Force meeting.

“On the heels of the mid-year meeting of the National Congress of American Indians, the timing was right to initiate a forum to openly share our Cultural Resources Program with the tribes within the district boundaries and provide early involvement in program activities,” says Omaha District Commander Col. Kurt F. Ubbelohde.

More than 30 Tribes and Tribal agencies, along with state and federal agencies interested in the Omaha District Cultural Resources Program, were invited to participate in the June 20-21 meetings.

Former Oglala Sioux Tribal Chairman Harold Salway moderated the meeting and led the group through an organizational presentation by Ubbelohde and a presentation by Omaha District Cultural Resources Program Manager Larry Janis.

The afternoon session, facilitated by Larry Spears, Dave Pearce and Sharon Vogel of the Consensus Council, Inc., generated a lively discussion on the topic of what the Omaha District Cultural Resources Program should be focusing on. An extensive list of items was developed and shared.

Chairman Tex Hall of the Three Affiliated Tribes and President of the National Congress of American Indians visited the session to show support for the important work being done by the attendees.

“His vision of collaboration has been instrumental in helping us move forward on these challenging issues,” says Tribal liaison Pem Hall. “His presence is a great show of support and encouragement.”

The second day’s discussion centered on three topics pre-selected by the corps: Development of a cultural site monitoring and enforcement plan, development of a programmatic agreement for the Missouri River main stem operation and management and input on the further development of cultural resources program activities. An Inter-Tribal working group was formed to continue the discussion on each of the topics.

“We are excited at the possibilities of early involvement of Tribal representatives in the

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development of a monitoring plan and programmatic agreement,” says Janis. “We understand that this is not consultation, but we hope that by having early involvement by Tribal members, the products that are produced will be better because of their input and will be better received during the consultation process.”

The next meeting of the Cultural Resources Task Force is scheduled for Feb. 11-12, 2003 in Rapid City, S.D. This will allow time for the Tribal members to meet and have a product to bring back to the task force.

“I feel good about what we’ve started in this two-day session,” says Ubbelohde. “We’re looking forward to the next meeting and will continue to seek out additional opportunities for the Tribes to be involved in the process.”

Additional information and materials from the meeting are available on the Omaha District Cultural Resources Web site at www.nwo.usace.army.mil/html/pd-e/CRWebsite/Index.html.